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ABSTRACT

The relationship between school site culture and secondary school reform is examined in this paper, which focuses on high school teachers' impact on the implementation of school-based management. Traditional high school organization contains all the elements that stifle the development of a positive school culture: large staffs, academic isolation, self-actualized teachers, lack of a shared school mission, and student tracking systems. Because collaborative relationships among teachers determine the development of a positive school culture, teacher acceptance of restructuring is argued to be necessary for bridging the gap between planning and implementing restructuring. Administrators must operate on two assumptions: (1) secondary education must be restructured so that teachers manage curriculum and instruction at their sites; and (2) reform can occur only when teachers are ready to make it happen. Administrators must first understand their sites' social organizations and know how to change from a negative to a positive school culture. The greatest resistance may come from secondary teachers. The recommendation is made to supplement restructuring with comprehensive administrative inservice programs on the implications of staff culture. (Contains 10 references.) (LMI)

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WHEN THE RESTRUCTURING BANDWAGON REACHES HIGH SCHOOL, WILL SITE CULTURE BAR THE DOOR?

An examination of the relationship between site culture and reform of the high school

Restructuring is the educational buzzword of the '90s. The popular press as well as the literature on schooling promotes the theory that since earlier reform efforts have not made significant change, surely a complete restructuring of education must be necessary.[1] In response to public concern that students are not learning in school, many convincing voices of educators, politicians, and business-people are directing attention to models of new organizational structure for schooling. Great expense of time and money has been made in the name of Restructuring in several states. As the fervor for this new reform movement begins to accelerate and become the focus of attention of government leaders, it resembles a political bandwagon. Restructuring is at hand. Of the many issues such a radical proposal generates, this report will focus on high school teachers as, 1) the key element that determines the quality of education that is receiving the most criticism; and, 2) site-based management: teacher control of their own school budgets, curriculum, and management systems in the

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successfully restructured school.

The missing link between planning for restructuring and implementation of teacher control of school management is the assurance of teacher acceptance of this responsibility.

How do administrators see to it that conditions exist such that teachers will volunteer to take on the time and effort such responsibility entails? To what extent should planners of effective high school organization restructuring[2] projects be concerned with the social organization (culture) of a school staff? As with all school reform, it is the teachers who play the major role. Yet, while many leaders call for restructuring, develop strategic plans, and begin model programs, few teachers have been consulted about implementation. Many are unaware of the issues or the roles they are expected to play.

In the past, hierarchical management systems[3] trained teachers in new methodologies. Teachers were expected to implement instructional practice in programs planned by Central Office supervisors. This type of change effort has not resulted in increased student learning. Behind closed doors, teachers continue to

teach as they wish.

In order to understand what educational leaders can expect of the role of teachers in change efforts, it is important to examine the parallel issues of restructuring through site-based management and that of site culture. Culture in this sense means the social organization of a school staff which represents shared beliefs, customs, attitudes and expectations.

In this early stage of restructuring, it is difficult to assess new programs; however, where districts and states report success, it is at the site level. The assumption is that this is where the power for change must be.[4]

Additionally, educational writers believe that the social aspect of site staffs is an important indication of whether or not reform of any kind will be implemented. The social organization of teachers in their workplace guides the attitudes of individual teachers at the school. The focus of social organization is the well-being of its members. Teachers who look forward to coming to work spend hours beyond duty involved in projects that help students. They work collaboratively with their peers in what is described as a positive site

culture. At other schools, many teachers have experienced marginality in their own profession; i.e., they have been powerless to control their role at school, and face public expectations beyond what they perceive as their responsibility. Teachers who put in only the hours mandated, believe their students to be unable to learn, and themselves as unable to teach them, often isolated within their classroom, are said to be members of a negative site culture.[5]

What is it that creates a positive culture at one site and a negative at another? Many educators lay the blame with traditional hiearachical school management. In this system, teachers are treated as if incapable of making decisions. Where teachers are respected for their professionalism, supported in their work, given responsibility for school planning, their culture reflects a shared belief that they are important to the school. They believe they can make a change in student achievement, they have a positive attitude toward the mission of the school.[6]

Writers of the literature on site culture are usually researchers of that which creates or impedes excellence in schools. They have singled out the

teachers' relationship with peers as the most important aspect in making a difference between schools that can bring change and those that do not. These writers point to team-work and collaboration as the basic ingredient to bringing about change. Assumptions regarding culture are that it needs to be positive in order for change to be maintained. The implications are that positive site culture will nurture change efforts and negative culture stifles change.

Authors writing about site based management in restructuring high school are people who are concerned with student drop-out ratios and community pressure for schools to graduate young people who will be competent in the world of work and study. They rarely discuss the possibility that site culture could be an impediment to student learning. Traditionally, no thought was given to the impact of teachers' social organization upon the quality of instruction. In recent years. behavioral science organizational theorists have demonstrated that when administrators seek to understand the social aspects of staff organization, they are better able to achieve success.

Even the most brief examination of traditional high

school organizational structure is cause for concern regarding the existance of negative culture. All the elements which stifle development of positive culture are present: large staff, isolation through segregated academic departments, self-actualized teachers,[7] lack of shared school mission, and student tracking systems. What we know of site culture implies that it must support and nurture school staffs who are expected to solve their own problems and manage their sites. Staff culture must be such that people can work together as a team; there is no place for isolation and low self-esteem in the restructuring process.

California teachers are beginning to feel the impact of the movement upon their professional lives. When interviewed, one spoke for many when she expressed the opinion that site-based management is "probably just another hoop the district office will put the teachers through." She remarked that for over 25 years of her teaching experience, many reforms had been ordered but that after initial training, no district support was ever given to help teachers implement the new ideas. By this time, she felt most teachers would fulfill the newest idea from Central Office in name only, continuing to

teach behind closed doors much the same as they have for many years. She was doubtful that district executives would share power with teachers. She believes that unless District Office officials start to invite teachers to help them plan the programs needed for their specific schools, teachers will not change. This educator acknowledged that her site culture fit the negative profile.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

While the literature has many voices speaking to these issues, the peculiarities of high school staff culture and its relationship to successful implementation of secondary school site-based management has not yet been thoroughly explored.

If the assumption is 1), that to reform secondary education, it must be restructured so that teachers manage curriculum and instruction at their sites, and 2), reform can take place only when teachers are ready to make it happen[8], it follows that administrators who wish to lead high school site-based management projects must first understand their site social organizations and know how to bridge from negative to positve culture.

As an administrator of a large high school, this

writer assumes that bringing change through restructuring will meet the greatest resistance from teachers at the high school level, as few secondary administrators have a working knowledge of the research on staff culture. A further assumption can easily be drawn that where administrators are not cognizant of the implications of staff culture, this may provide a barrier to adoption of site-based management.

Inferences drawn from the literature, the writers' experience and teacher interviews are that Secondary School districts wishing to increase and improve student achievement would be well advised to involve their administrators with comprehensive inservice programs on the implications of staff culture as parallel training with that of the aspects of restructuring.

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ENDNOTES

1. A report of the 1990 survey taken by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce's Center for Workforce Preparation and Quality Education revealed that 75% of U. S. citizens believe the public schools fail to prepare students for the working world.

2. Note that this word is sometimes spelled as here, to describe the process of restructuring education. When spelled as Restructuring, the work describes a movement in educational reform.

3. organizational structure which is built on hierarchy of authority

4. The Superintendent of Jefferson County, Ky. Public School District for 10 years is a nationally recognized leader in restructuring and site-based management. In her 1990 article, Donald Ingiverson, The Executive Educator, 12(10), p.14, she quotes him: "If anything is going to happen, it's going to happen at the school level.

5. Sarason, S. B. The Culture Of The School And The Problem Of Change. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1982

6. Barth, R. S. (1990). Improving Schools From Within. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Henshaw, J., Wilson, C. & Morefield, J. (1989). Seeing clearly: The school as the unit of change. In J. I. Goodlad (Ed.), The ecology of School Renewal. (pp. 134-151). Chicago: NSSE; House, E. R. (1989). Three perspectives on innovation> In R.

Lehnming & M. Kane (Eds.), Improving Schools: Using What We Know. (pp. 17-41). Beverly Hills: Sage; Sergiovanni, Thos. (1990). N. Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

7. These are teachers who look to themselves for direction. Normally they are excellent. The problem lies where others are not included in their plans and work. It is very difficult for these people to collaborate; it is difficult for low self-esteem teachers to seek them out for help.

8. Site-Based Management Information Folio. Arlington: Educational Research Service, 1990.

Notes on the Author

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Previous publications include the following:

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